

FARMWORKER PREVAILING WAGE SURVEY

The Idaho Department of Labor recently completed its annual Farmworker Prevailing Wage Survey for 2001 for occupations that have been filled via the federal H-2A program. The H-2A program allows employers, who can demonstrate the need, to apply for temporary, non-immigrant alien workers to perform agricultural work of a seasonal or temporary nature.

A major purpose of the survey is to gather wage and salary information from random agricultural employers

to determine the prevailing or current market wage for temporary, seasonal farmworker occupations in specific areas of the state. For all H-2A job orders, the guaranteed hourly rate to be paid to *all workers performing similar work* must be the higher of the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR), Federal or State minimum wage, or applicable prevailing hourly wage rate. Developed by U.S. Department of Agriculture, the AEWRs were adopted by the U.S. Department of Labor to prevent the employment of aliens from adversely affecting the wages of similarly employed U.S. workers.

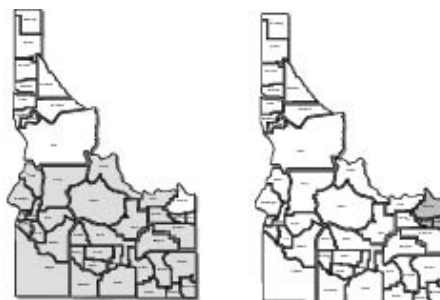
If performing piece rate work, the piece-rate wage shall be no less than the activity's prevailing piece-rate for that area. The worker must also be paid no less than the guaranteed hourly earning for the pay period. If the piece-rate earnings fall below the guaranteed hourly rate, the worker's pay must be supplemented to meet the guaranteed earnings at the end of the pay period.

Among the additional employer requirements necessary for program participation, all H-2A Job Orders must offer housing and, if a prevailing practice of employment, board as well, all at no cost to both U.S. and alien workers.

DROUGHT CONDITIONS

A second portion of this year's survey³ included questions designed to gain information about the economic impact of the drought this year. This year's extreme drought conditions had an adverse impact on the agricultural sector of Idaho's economy. Many reservoirs were below 50% capacity and the prospect of water throughout the entire growing season was bleak. Survey questions included Idaho Power buyback participation, change in crop rotation, alternative crops, and impact to the number of seasonal farmworkers hired.

Chart 1: Farmworker Prevailing Wages 2001



Dictionary of Occupational Title	Official Prevailing Wage Determinations for the 34 Counties	Official Prevailing Wage Determinations for the 3 Counties
Farmworker, Diversified	\$5.75 per hour	\$7.00 per hour
Farmworker, General I	\$6.50 per hour	no finding ¹
Irrigator, 2-inch Hand Line	\$7.25 per hour	no finding ¹
Irrigator, 3-inch Hand Line	\$6.00 per hour	no finding ¹
Irrigator, 3-inch/ 4-inch Hand Line	\$0.141 per pipe + \$0.016 per pipe bonus (end of season)	no finding ¹
Irrigator, 4-inch Hand Line	\$0.17 per pipe	\$0.13 per pipe + \$0.03 per pipe bonus (end of season)
Irrigator, 4-inch Wheel Line	\$3.95 per line	no finding ¹
Irrigator, 4-inch/ 5-inch Wheel Line	\$6.79 per hour	no finding ¹
Irrigator, 5-inch Wheel Line	\$5.75 per hour + \$0.25 per hour bonus (end of season)	no finding ¹
Irrigator, Center Pivot	\$7.50 per hour + \$0.50 per hour bonus (end of season)	no finding ¹
Irrigator, Drag Line	no finding ¹	no finding ¹
Irrigator, Drip System	no finding ¹	no finding ¹
Irrigator, Solid Set	\$6.79 per hour	no finding ¹
Irrigator, Surface Flood	\$6.50 per hour	no finding ¹

¹Information certified and made official by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration.

¹Past annual prevailing wage surveys have elicited *piece rate* pay methods for pipe or line moving duties within the irrigator occupation. Only after subsequent surveys in the coming years will we be able to identify if indeed the apparent trend towards hourly pay will continue.

²A prevailing wage survey capable of resulting in a prevailing wage finding could not be conducted due to insufficient number of employers employing domestic workers. Wage information from adjoining States or wage reporting area and/or prior surveys was also inadequate for purposes of making a 2001 prevailing wage determination for this activity.

³The annual prevailing wage survey was conducted to determine the prevailing wage rate that may be used as a minimum pay rate for U.S. and alien workers employed by H-2A employer participants. Farmers were randomly chosen from a large database compiled from multiple sources including the Idaho Department of Labor, Idaho Tax Commission, Idaho Potato Commission and the Western Stockman's Association. The sample size, sample distribution, and survey methodology follow the guidelines outlined in the Employment Training Administration Handbook 385.

The following charts reflect the information obtained from over 400 farms in 34 counties throughout Idaho, (Northern Idaho was not surveyed)⁴. The 34 counties make up four of the five Agricultural Areas (see map below).

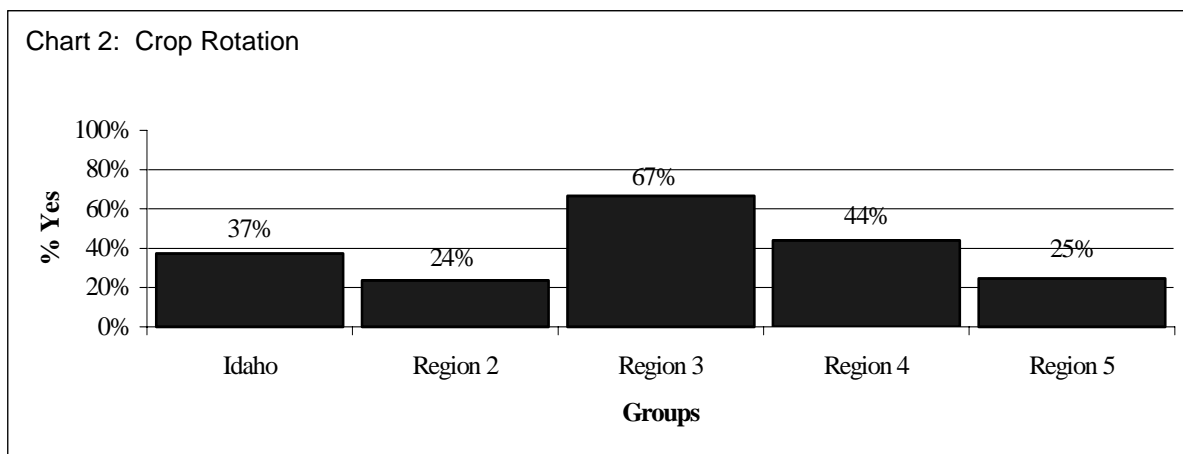
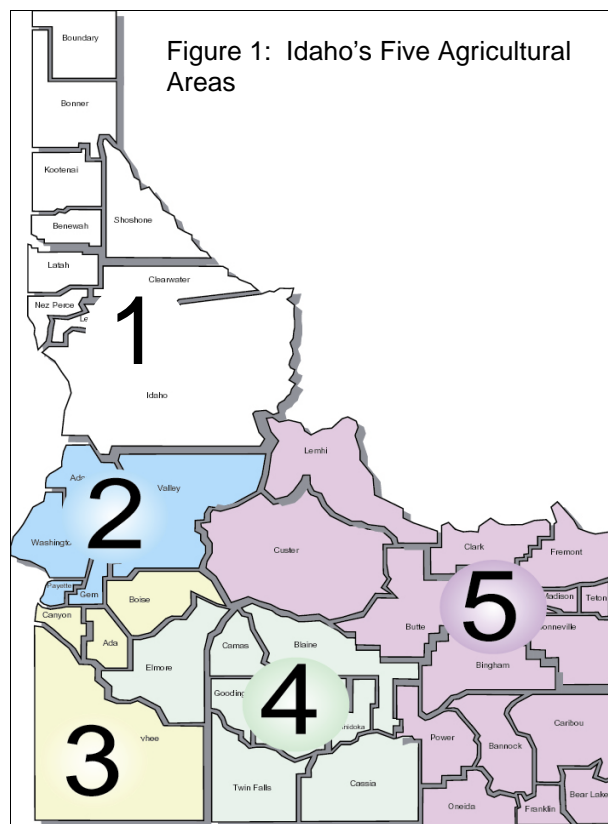
Approximately 37 percent of Idaho's farmers who responded to the survey indicated they changed the order of their crop rotation because of extreme drought conditions. The highest percentage of change came from Agricultural Area 3 which had 67% of farms changing crop rotation. This was expected due to the very low water levels in many of the reservoirs in that region. A lower percentage of farmers (24%) planted completely different crops to help reduce the effects of the drought. (See Chart 2.)

A smaller percentage (20%) of farmers participated in the Idaho Power Buyback program. This program created financial incentives for not using or limiting electricity consumption for operation of irrigation pumps. Many of these farmers (51%) also chose to either change crop rotation (1%), plant different crops (25%) or do both (25%) on those acres not involved in the buyback. As might be expected, many buyback participants (42%) opted to either plant a dry land crop or use alternative means to operate their pumps on those acres involved in the buyback (see Chart 3 on page 23). (According to Idaho Power figures, a total of 429 farmers participated in the power buyback with a total of 154,439 or 7% of all acres taken out of production. This acreage may include land on which farmers opted to plant dry land crops or use alternative means to operate pumps.)

The data also indicated that 18% of the farmers surveyed hired fewer seasonal farmworkers this year due to the drought, resulting in 9% fewer seasonal workers in 2001. Therefore, approximately 560 fewer seasonal farmworkers in the 34 counties were hired overall in 2001. This number is reflective only of the seasonal

farmworkers hired directly for the *Farmworker Diversified Crops*, *Farmworker General*, and *Irrigator* occupations. (See Charts 4 & 5 on page 23.)

Ricardo Barrera, Workforce Development
Program Specialist
(208) 332-3570, ext. 3322
rbarrera@labor.state.id.us
Kelly Campbell, Research Analyst, Sr.
(208) 332-3570, ext. 3202
kcampbel@labor.state.id.us
Idaho Department of Labor
317 W. Main Street, Boise, ID 83735



⁴ Agricultural Area 1, which consists of all the counties north of Adams and Valley Counties, was not surveyed because of the lack of need for prevailing wage information for the three job categories. Agricultural areas are developed according to factors such as geography, topography, climate, seasonality, and crops.

Chart 3: Idaho Power Buyback

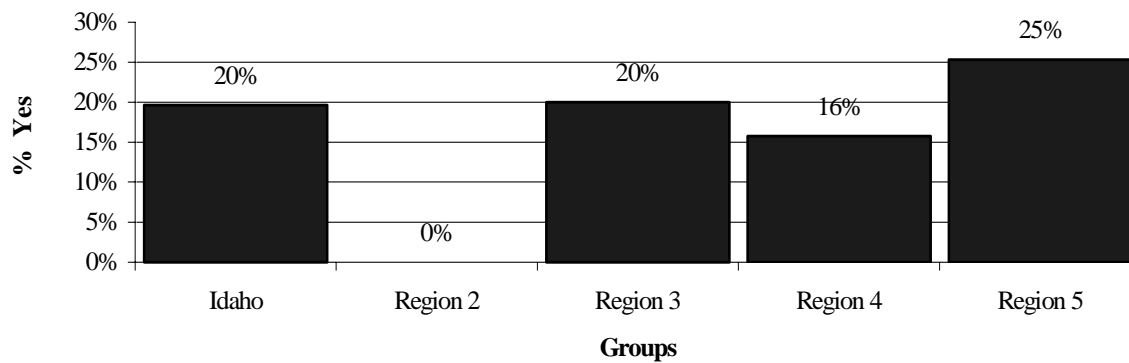


Chart 4: Percent of Farmers Who Hired Fewer Seasonal Workers

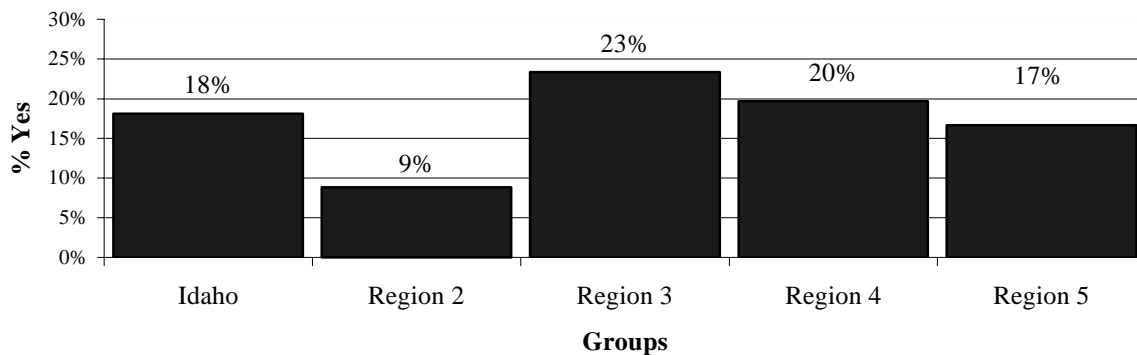


Chart 5: Percent of Fewer Seasonal Workers Hired

